

Corps Dams Begin Spill to Move Young Salmon Downriver

Portland, Ore. - As the 2002 fish migration season gets underway in the Columbia Basin, recent forecasts indicate the region should see a more normal water year. Young salmon will soon travel over dam spillways to speed their journey downstream to the Pacific Ocean. Spill, one of several means used to aid juvenile fish passage, occurs when water is sent over the spillway rather than through powerhouse turbines.

Spring spill season begins April 3 and is slated to run through June at most of the Corps main stem dams on the Columbia and Snake waterway. Spill operations follow the Biological Opinion (BiOp) recommendation of the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) calling for specific levels, timing and length of spill at each project.

The first project to initiate spring spill will be Lower Granite Dam on the Snake River, where extensive testing and research on reducing dissolved gases is underway. Spilling at the remaining dams will proceed according to the BiOp schedule, subject to review by the multi-agency Technical Management Team. At Lower Monumental Dam, construction to repair erosion of the stilling basin caused by earlier spills will curtail spill for the season.

Spilling to the levels suggested by the BiOp is possible because the March final water supply forecast for April - July 2002, issued by the National Weather Service, is about 91 percent of average, a substantial increase over last year's observed runoff for the same period. Hydrologists expect to see a 97.3 million acre feet (MAF) volume January - July at The Dalles, a key index point, compared to the 58.2 MAF observed runoff in 2001, the second lowest on record.

Last year, regional power shortages, a concern for system reliability, and unusually dry conditions resulted in the declaration of a power emergency and a federal agency emergency operations plan that recognized the scarcity of water available for spill. In low water years, such as 2001, the NMFS Biological Opinion provides for changes in river operations, including spill. To lessen the effects of last year's minimal spill and overall poor in-river conditions for fish, the Corps increased transportation of juvenile salmon, resulting in about 90-95 percent of Snake River fish safely transported to below Bonneville Dam. Federal agencies also used cool water releases from Dworshak Dam in July and August to provide additional protection for Snake River fish.

For more information on how spill works -
<https://www.nwd.usace.army.mil/ps/ropsspill.htm>

For BiOp spill recommendations -
<http://www.nwr.noaa.gov/1hydrop/hydroweb/fedrec.htm>

See Chapter 9.6

To view actions taken for salmon recovery - <http://www.salmonrecovery.gov/>

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